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# A LETTER FROM THE BISHOP OF COLOMBO

TO

THE MEMBERS

OF

# THE CEYLON MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION.



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COLOMBO, EVE OF ST. ANDREW, 1876.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

IT was promised before we left England at the beginning of this year, that the day on which we were to start, the Feast of the Epiphany, should be treated as the Anniversary, on whose return the members of our Association should especially remember us and our work in their prayers, and receive and exchange information about it. I and those who sailed with me promised on our part that you should receive an annual letter from the Bishop at this time.

I can assure you that we have continually felt, as we have indeed needed, the blessing of your prayers. As each day brought its new difficulties or its new opportunities, it has been our delight to remember that many prayers were working together to win us strength and wisdom to bear the trial or do justice to the opportunity. It has been one of our chief aims to make our work here a work done in the power of prayer, and I, as Bishop, have tried to deepen, wherever I have gone, the habit of trusting to prayer; making it, as it were, my motto, that the diocese of Colombo should be a praying diocese. We strive, clergy, catechists, schoolmasters, to be true to this; and there are many families, native as well as English, where those who can take no active part, are doing their utmost to work by prayer. Heavy trials have befallen the diocese since our Association began its work, but we need not be discouraged. Who

can say how much bitterness, how much loss of ground, has been averted by your prayers? Nor is it any bad omen that we should sow in tears. Let us only go boldly on our way, the way of prayer,—or shall we say still better—the way of sorrow, and we shall doubtless come again with joy.

On this day, the eve of the Day of Intercession, I enlarge on this point with the more pleasure, knowing that to-morrow there will be many with us, banded together to secure us a blessing. At this very moment there lies upon me, as Bishop, the responsibility of a decision on which the welfare of our Church may much depend, and it is a great comfort to me that the critical step need not be taken until after St. Andrew's Day.

I have no wish to enter at any length into the subject which has lately brought our diocese before the attention of the Church, especially as I hope that, by God's mercy, by the time this reaches you, our troubles may be in great measure at an end. But I will call your attention to two things which, arising out of what seemed so evil, are likely to be the causes of much good, and may make us hereafter look back with thankfulness on this year's trials. One of these is the spontaneous and united movement by which a very large number of the laity came forward to claim their share in the interests of the Church, to testify to their value for her Divine organization, and their sense of their own responsibility for its maintenance. Such is the basis, a hearty and united laity, on which the structure of a Church organization may be securely raised. The other fact of happy promise, to which I alluded, is the Conference of the Presbytery, lately held: at which every priest of the diocese, except the representatives of the Church Missionary Society, was present. There were thirty-three assembled to advise the Bishop, and the unity, wisdom, and moderation which characterised the Conference was full of encouragement. So many clergy had never, I believe, met together in Ceylon before. Those who may have an opportunity of reading the Proceedings will, I think, rejoice to see how much good sense and piety, and I may add how much eloquence, our native clergy showed.

You will see, my friends, that we have got the elements and the activities of a living Church. And you will not wonder that we wish to live our own life, in dependence on the great Body of which we form a member, without too much intrusion of the system of any external society. But enough of this.

I would gladly tell you something, if it were only a little, of the different parts of the happy and hopeful work which is going on here; though I could never bring before you in their vividness the flashes of spiritual forces, good and bad, which to the newcomer into a land of heathenism, reveal, like lightning, the tremendous powers that are ever present in the moral world. There are cases where the splendid movement and palpable effects of the Spirit of Truth, almost startle and surprise one, though one has always professed to believe their possibility. And there are cases when the hideous vigour of evil reminds us too painfully how near we are to Satan's undisturbed domain,—how truly evil our nature is, where it has not been in contact with even the outside circles of Christian influence. If anyone wants to feel the reality of spiritual powers, let him come into a heathen land and talk to new converts, see in their faces the glow of the Spirit's triumph, or hear them tell of the malignity that lurks under the specious show of gentleness in the followers of Buddha.

But our Church is not one of new converts only. The English residents, whether Government officials, merchants, or planters, bring out to us the culture and problems of the Church at home, and in a great many instances the best fruits of the energy which characterizes the home Church. There are indeed cases in which the influence of the Englishman, especially in remote districts little visited or but lately entered by the Church, has been exerted for sad evil; but these are every day fewer; on the whole it may be said that the leading officials, the leading merchants, and the leading planters, would be conspicuous in any society for the aid they render to the cause of good.

In many of what we call "out-stations" the welfare of the Church depends very greatly on the influence and example of the resident civil servants, and the churches that are rising in so many places, and the liberality with which poor districts contribute to the salary of their clergyman, show how well the influence is used. Let not "our English brethren" be forgotten in your prayers; especially those very young men who are continually coming out to live in our coffee districts, a life exposed indeed to great temptations and deprived of many safeguards, but a life in which there is great scope for manly responsibility and kindly contact with one's fellow-men.

In the coffee districts of Maskeliya, Dickoya, Dimbula, Nilembe, Pundhuloya, churches are being built by the efforts of planters and proprietors; schools are being opened in many places for the children of the coolies, so that if only masters can be found, there will soon be no children in some districts, notably in that of Matale, who have not education of some degree within their reach. It is through the children that we hope to win these people. Some of the adults are Christians, coming from Christian villages in India; but to convert the grown-up people here, in the midst of their labour, with their deeply ingrained prejudice, seems almost hopeless.

By the combined efforts of English and native gentlemen chiefly, churches are being, or about to be, built in Caltura, Ratnapura, Colombo; parsonages are rising in Kurunegala, Puttalam, and other places; schools springing up everywhere,—in short, the same vigour is to be seen in at least the outward evidences of Church life as we enjoy in England.

Now let me say a word about the Burghers, or "European descendants." These are the descendants of the former Portuguese and Dutch colonists, in a few instances of pure race, but generally mingled in varying degrees with the Sinhalese and Tamils. The upper classes among these live as European gentlemen, hold high and responsible offices, and are, in most towns, among the most earnest supporters of the Church; though where the old Dutch Presbyterianism was strongly established, a very strong leaven of it remains; and sitting at the prayers instead of kneeling has become almost a recognized custom in the churches. The lower classes of Burghers are a somewhat pitiable race. Neither in body nor in mind have they the vigour of the pure races.

A great number of these, in the larger towns, are extremely poor and ignorant. Most are Roman Catholics, but a good many, in Colombo at least, belong to our Church, and furnish one of her most distressing problems. They speak a little Portuguese, a little Sinhalese or Tamil, and perhaps a little English; but they cannot be said to *know* any language, they have pride in no history, and access to no literature. They belong, in Colombo, to the charge of the Portuguese Chaplain; but scattered as they are, he cannot of course reach all, and to a great many the ministrations of the Church are unknown. To provide for their needs in those parts of the town called

Marandahn, Demetagoda, and Borella, is a pressing duty of their richer neighbours.

I pass on to what some of my English friends are I know most interested in—the Sinhalese and Tamil Churches. But I would not have it forgotten that the Church in Ceylon derives its strength and vigour in great measure from the English and European elements. Out from these, who have imbibed the culture of centuries of Christianity, and therewith, as one soon sees out here, many sterling Christian qualities which the new convert acquires but slowly, flows forth the spirit which gives life to the native Churches. We find ourselves, in planning work in a new town or district, how necessary it is to take for our starting-point and *point d'appui* the nucleus of Christian life, more steady perhaps than brilliant, which already exists there. The old Christianity is like a flame which is dull perhaps but not ready quickly to go out, and at this the new lamps must be kindled.

Of the leaders of the native Churches, the Sinhalese and Tamil clergy, it would not become me to say much. They are not men towards whom or about whom one is inclined to use a patronizing tone; but men often of very signal piety, in several instances of high culture not below the English standard, and in almost every case sensible and active and self-denying. As far as my short experience enables me to judge, the native clergy labour, as a rule, under a disadvantage from having seen no models of well-worked parishes, finished services, and the like; but are not at all deficient in invention, readiness to adopt and adapt, or in that originality which hereafter make our new Churches in some points teachers to the old. They have not yet learnt, they have never had the opportunity of learning, to work together; from the scantiness of labourers, they have been kept far apart, and it has surprised me to hear it seriously doubted by one of long experience whether two could ever work happily together in one district. My determined plan of putting men two and two together, is regarded with something more than surprise. But though I was prepared to find the native clergy deficient in organizing power, I must say that what I have seen makes all the other way. In their financial organization, for church-building, school-maintenance, and the like, and in the use they make of lay help, some clergymen, whom I could name, show a very vigorous talent.

In looking forward to the future of our Church we feel that its prosperity depends in an immense degree on the young men who are to be the future clergy,—on their ability, their social influence, and above all on their devotion to the cause and Person of our Lord. I ask, therefore, your heartiest prayers for our Divinity students. We have, I think, very excellent material; young men whose heart is in their religion, who are wonderfully free from worldly aims, docile and intelligent. We have ten such in St. Thomas's College now; varying from eighteen to twenty-two years in age. An immense responsibility lies on those who have to guide them now; and we need your prayers that they may be taught the secret of a close walk with God, and a complete detachment from the world; that simplicity may not deteriorate into weakness, but be sanctified after the likeness of our Lord.

Among these students there are one or two, and we have many others in different places, who have, as lads, embraced Christianity, and thereupon been expelled from their homes and kindred, and excluded from all the earthly prospects which lay before them,—in some instances very desirable prospects indeed, from a Sinhalese point of view. Many lads, who are not actually turned out of their homes, are undergoing—and so are some girls too, for that matter—considerable persecution. These need your prayers.

We are not, of course, sorry to see some resentment excited among the heathen; it is a sign that the Church is alive; nor are we sorry—very far from it—that some of our brethren should endure a little persecution; but the increase of this resentment does expose us to a difficulty. Our schools and schoolmasters depend in great measure on the Government grant, and the Government grant in great measure on the number of pupils; therefore when we find, as lately in a school in the south of the island, fifteen boys kept away on account of a conversion, we are liable to be tempted to sacrifice the decided Christian aim of the school to the desire of keeping the list full. We shall probably—for in some parts at least the animosity of the Buddhists is increasing—suffer considerable pecuniary loss.

Boarding schools, where the children are altogether under Christian care, instead of returning to heathen homes each evening, have a great advantage. In some of these most encouraging results are reached. Such are Mrs. Doubiggin's school

for Sinhalese girls at Cotta ; Mrs. Rowland's for Tamils at Borella—both near Colombo—Mrs. Marks' orphanage at Buona Vista, where forty Sinhalese girls are trained under the care of the superintendent and of the Rev. P. Marks, an indefatigable Missionary ; such will be the Kandy boarding school just now to be opened, under the Archdeacon's supervision, by two ladies who have come out for the purpose, in a genuine Missionary spirit, from England. The Kandy school, however, will be filled, we hope, chiefly with the children of Christian parents. This is one of the new undertakings for which I especially ask your prayers.

Another such new undertaking is the opening of a large and important Mission District between the towns of Kalutara and Ratnapura. This will be begun on St. Thomas's Day, when the new church at Kalutara will be consecrated, and the Rev. R. H. Duthy ordained priest, and instituted to the care of the District with the Rev. J. C. M. Ogilvie as his colleague. Schools will be opened in Kalutara, and at many of the villages—where such a thing is almost unknown ; and gradually Catechists, as they can be got (for this is a great need), posted in different centres, which the clergy will regularly visit. A good deal of readiness to build schools and receive teachers has been shown by the people of the villages. The district is at present very inaccessible, there being very few roads ; but it is likely soon to be more "opened up." Help for founding schools and paying teachers, towards the maintenance of lads to be trained as masters or catechists for the district, or for building the necessary parsonage and school-houses at Kalutara, will be thankfully received. "The Kalutara Mission" is one of the objects which I specially commend to the liberality of our friends.

Another is the church and schools in Kotahena, a poor district in Colombo. This I have begun, and half completed, and have had considerable subscriptions from the Church people of Colombo ; but these will not meet the necessary outlay. I suggest therefore to my friends as a second object the "Kotahena Fund."

Another enterprise very shortly to be undertaken—an enterprise of considerable magnitude—is the foundation of a Training College for Schoolmasters, a need most severely felt ; at present all efforts are hampered by the want of masters.

I might easily make a long list of the works either soon to

be, or actually begun, by the energy of different parts of the Diocese, and would gladly try to enlist your interest and chiefly your prayers for each; but in the midst of a pressing correspondence, and many engagements, I have been able only to put together these few fragmentary notices, rather in order not to break my promise of writing some description of my work, than because I could keep it fully.

Finally, let me ask you once more not to flag in your prayers for us; the more unworthy of them we are, the more we need them.

I remain,

Your grateful Friend in Christ,

R. S. COLOMBO.

*December 7, 1876.*







